



# **BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICE**

(adopted June 21, 2007)



**Title:** Managing Russian Olive in the Yellowstone River Valley

EXHIBIT 14

DATE 1/21/08

HB 8

## **Introduction:**

Russian olive is an invasive plant that is particularly detrimental to the ecological function and economic values of riparian areas. Russian olive should not be planted in the Yellowstone River valley, and where it currently exists, Russian olive should be controlled or eradicated.

1. To control and prevent the spread of Russian olive, the Yellowstone River Conservation District Council (YRCDC) encourages counties along the Yellowstone River to establish Special Management Zones (SMZ) within the Yellowstone Valley where local interest is high. Participation by landowners in the SMZ weed management plan would be strictly voluntary.
2. Conservation districts and local Extension Service offices along the Yellowstone River that have annual tree/shrub programs will be encouraged to remove Russian olive from their recommended species list for tree/shrub plantings within the Yellowstone River Valley.
3. State and federal agencies who manage recreational sites, fishing access sites, experiment stations, and wildlife management areas situated along the Yellowstone River will be encouraged to no longer plant Russian olive on these lands, and to begin removing Russian olive where feasible.

## **Supporting Documents & Organizations:**

Weed Districts The Montana Code Annotated 2005 Section 7-22-2121 (4) Weed Management Program states, "The board may establish special management zones within the district. The management criteria in such zones may be more or less stringent than the general management criteria for the district." Note that:

- Establishing a SMZ for Russian olive would allow for an application to the Noxious Weed Trust Fund that otherwise would not be available.
- County Commissioners may impose a tax for weed control within the SMZ (7-22-2142 (6)) that would have to be approved by the majority of the voters within the SMZ.

Conservation Districts The Montana Code Annotated 2005 Section 76-15-601 further states that regarding establishment of project areas or special assessments that "whenever the public interest or convenience may require and upon the petition of a county, city, town, cooperative grazing association, or other special purpose district or by more than 50% of the qualified electors affected thereby, the board of supervisors is hereby authorized and empowered to establish project areas for carrying out projects to accomplish one or more of the purposes of the district and within which area special assessments can be made for carrying out project purposes."

## **Yellowstone River *Conservation District* Council**

1371 Rimtop Drive • Billings, MT 59105 (406) 247-4412

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Federal Legislation 2006 H.R. 2720 Salt Cedar and Russian Olive Control Demonstration Act directs the Department of the Interior to carry out an assessment and demonstration program to control the spread of salt cedar and Russian olive trees in the western United States.

Montana NRCS Strategy An excerpt from this strategy paper asserts, “in light of the concerns with the use of Russian olive, a strategy has been developed to remove Russian olive from Montana’s NRCS FOTG (Field Office Technical Guides, Jan 2007).

Role of the YRCDC The governor, state government agencies, and regional citizens are looking to the YRCDC for leadership on managing the Yellowstone River. The recommendation is based upon existing sound science and responds to the growing concern regarding Russian olive.

### **Rationale for Recommendation:**

Numerous scientific studies and reports have repeatedly outlined the effects of Russian olive invasions on riparian areas. Some of the effects often mentioned include:

- Originally planted in shelterbelts, it is one of the hardiest species of trees introduced to the Great Plains and has persisted and spread in many areas, especially in the understory along rivers and streams.
- Russian olive will continue to increase along Montana rivers and streams, at least partly due to its relative immunity from beaver use, its tree-size stature, shade tolerance, drought tolerance, and salt tolerance. As old cottonwood trees die, forests of Russian olive will be left in their place.
- On many sites, Russian olive forms thickets such that it excludes most other species and can spread to low lying pastures reducing forage production and utilization by livestock. Dense stands of Russian olive tend to limit access by livestock.
- Russian olive can invade irrigation canals increasing the maintenance requirements for these structures.
- It has been suggested that while Russian olive can enhance wildlife habitat for some species, it is used to a lesser degree than native vegetation. Research in Wyoming found that overall bird numbers and species diversity declined in riparian habitats dominated by Russian olive.

**For more information:** Contact your local Conservation District, or the YRCDC.

**CONSERVATION DISTRICT COUNCIL MEMBERS:** Carbon – Custer – Dawson – Park – Prairie – Richland – Rosebud – Stillwater – Sweet Grass – Treasure – Yellowstone – McKenzie County, North Dakota – MACD – RAC Chair

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